

What is Claimed is:

1. A method of screening email comprising the steps of:
  - providing an email address for receiving incoming email;
  - providing a list of approved email sources that are authorized to send email
- 5 messages to the email address;
  - receiving an incoming email addressed to the email address;
  - identifying the source of the incoming email message;
  - delivering the incoming email message to the email address if the source is an approved email source;
- 10 temporarily blocking delivery of the email to the receiving address and storing the incoming email message if the source of the incoming email is an approved email source;
  - sending an email to the source of the blocked email message requesting authentication of the source by entry of a reply command by the source;
- 15 if no reply is received to the source authorization request, rejecting the temporarily stored incoming email message;
  - if a reply is received responsive to the source authorization request, comparing the source of the reply to the source of the incoming email message; and,
  - if the source of the reply is the same as the source of the incoming email,
- 20 delivering the incoming email to the email address.

2. A method according to claim 1 further comprising:

inserting a first predetermined series of characters in the authenticating email header of the authenticating email, and,

wherein the step of comparing the source of the reply to the source of the

5 incoming email message including the step of determining if the reply email header includes the first predetermined series of characters.

3. A method according to claim 2 further comprising:

the authenticating email having a subject box;

10 inserting a second predetermined series of characters in the authenticating email subject box; and,

determining if the reply email includes a subject box containing the second predetermined series of characters.

15 4. A method according to claim 1 wherein the step of comparing the source of the reply to the source of the incoming email message further comprises:

comparing the email header field of the incoming email message to the email header of the reply;

20 delivering the incoming email to the email address for receiving incoming email if a predetermined number of the reply email header fields and the incoming message fields match; and,

rejecting the incoming email if less than a predetermined number of the reply email header fields and the incoming message fields match.

5. A method according to claim 4 wherein the email header fields are selected  
5 from the group consisting of the return-path field, the reply-to field, the X-sender field, the FROM field, the X-mailer field, the message-ID field, and the connecting IP address field.

6. A method according to claim 4 wherein the predetermined number of email header fields is at least 2.

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7. A method according to claim 4 wherein the predetermined number of email header fields is at least 3.

8. A method according to claim 4 wherein the predetermined number of email header fields is at least 4.

9. A method according to claim 4 wherein the predetermined number of email header fields is at least 5.

20 10. A method according to claim 4 wherein the first predetermined series of characters in the authenticating email header of the authenticating email comprises "sourceauthentication:"